

**eliminating racism
empowering women**
ywca

February 26, 2010

Dear Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann:

On behalf of the 40 student activists of the YNet Program, we are writing in support of HB 5315 – An Act Concerning Education and the Reduction of Domestic Violence. YNet, which is based at Greenwich High School, is a partnership with the Greenwich YWCA.

We want to thank the Education Committee for recognizing teen dating violence as a prominent issue of concern in our state. We have special thanks to Representatives Mae Flexer, Terrie Wood and Gerry Fox of the House Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence, as well as Senator Toni Boucher for her support of teen dating violence initiatives.

Teen dating violence is a public health concern. There are strong correlations between teen dating violence and unwanted teen pregnancy, low academic performance, as well as depression and suicide; not to mention the fact that many abusive teen relationships set the stage for violent relationships in adulthood. Although teen dating violence has recently received more attention than ever, this public health issue has traditionally not been given as much attention as other less stigmatized problems, such as smoking and drunk driving.

HB 5315 is a positive step towards reducing incidents of teen dating violence in Connecticut. However, we believe it lacks a comprehensive action plan, which should include the recommendations of the Task Force on Domestic Violence; e.g., identify and integrate a standard teen dating violence curriculum into grades 7-12 and establish a school-wide policy on how to identify and address dating violence on campus and in school. We believe that educating teachers about abusive relationships, including how to identify and respond to warning signs, while important, is not sufficient to significantly reduce incidents of dating violence.

YNet and other youth-led organizations in Fairfield County (e.g., Center for Youth Leadership in Norwalk and the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council in Stamford), have been working diligently to increase awareness of teen dating violence and emphasize the large scope of addressing the problem. We believe it is imperative that teen dating violence education occur in middle and high schools because it is during these years that teens are experimenting with dating and having their first romantic

259 East Putnam Avenue - Greenwich, Connecticut 06830 - 203.869.6501

relationships. At this age, teens do not have the prior experience to compare their partner's behavior to and therefore, they cannot always recognize warning signs of an unhealthy relationship and/or abusive patterns. By including teen dating violence curriculum into legislation, students will learn how to develop healthy relationships in the comfortable and familiar setting of their school.

Thank you for reading our testimony regarding HB 5315. We congratulate you for your commitment to addressing teen dating violence and welcome you to our fight for promoting healthy relationships for teens in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Taylor Dawson
Alexa Hochstin
Samantha Stapleton

Sent to Chris Calabrese, clerk for the Education
Committee, at chris.calabrese@cga.ct.gov

Greenwich
February 26, 2010